

The history of State Employment Agency

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In 1991 The Ministry of Economics established State Employment department. Chairman of the Council of Ministers Ivars Godmanis and the Minister of Government Affairs Kārlis Līcis appoint Sergejs Blaževics as the director of the Service.

On April 17, 1991 the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia established the State Employment Service under the supervision of Ministry of Welfare.

In 1991 Latvia renewed its participation in the International Labour Organization (ILO) ratifying and adopting the conventions, and submitting yearly government reports. The Agency regularly provides information to the International Labour Organization about the labour market and unemployment situation in Latvia allowing to internationally compare the economic indicators.

On January 15, 1992 the first unemployed job seeker was registered, and 14 days later (in accordance with the laws of the time) was the first person to acquire unemployed person status. Within the period of one year the number of registered unemployed reached 31,000. In December of the same year the involvement of unemployed persons in active labour market measures (paid temporary public work and vocational training) was initiated.

In early 1993 the registered unemployment level was 2.7%. During that year computer programmes for accounting the unemployed and available vacancies were developed and implemented, the first statistical reports were made. Within a year the number of unemployed raised to 76,744 (5.7%).

In March 1995 the first measures for promoting employment were developed.

During 1996 the unemployment level rose from 83,000 (6.6%) to 90,819 (7.2%). Job seeker clubs were organised as an additional service for unemployed persons in Riga and Cēsis.

Starting from 1997 the director of State Employment Service was Andris Siliņš. During this time the Service actively cooperated with municipalities, and employment promotion plans were developed. A total of 5,501 unemployed persons joined the Job seeker club.

In 1998 an Employment information office was opened in Riga. The situation in labour market of Latvia was affected by the economical crisis in Russia; as a result the unemployment lever rose significantly during the last months of the year reaching 9.2%. The number of registered unemployed increased from 84,934 to 111,383.

In the beginning of 1999 the structure of State Employment Service included the central body, 20 financially independent State Employment Service centres, 8 State Employment Service departments and 38 State Employment Service offices.

On July 1, 1999 on the basis of State Employment Service – the civil office under the supervision of Ministry of Welfare – a non-profit association State joint-stock company State Employment Service (SES) was established. NPO SJSC State Employment Service holder of State capital share was the Ministry of Welfare. NPO SJSC State Employment Service was a two-level organisation consisting of administration and branch offices which, in their turn, consisted of 28 centres and 34 sectors. This way the whole territory of Latvia was covered, and people could receive SES services closer to their residence.

On September 11, 2000 Alvis Vitols was assigned as the director of NPO SJSC State Employment Service. SES thematic periodical "Darbdiena" (Weekday) was launched. The yearly average number of unemployed persons was still very high – 100,554.

In May 2001 State Employment Service joined The World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES). A number of pilot projects were launched this year – Unemployed Youth Work Practice with Employer, Subsidised Work Places for the Unemployed with Disabilities, Social Enterprises in Labour Market for the Employment of Less Competitive Unemployed.

In 2002 the Job seekers club is modified into measures for increasing competitiveness. Measures for certain groups of people are launched, such as Subsidised Work Places for People in Pre-Retirement Age.

With October 1, 2003 Cabinet of Ministers changed NPO SJSC State Employment Service to State Employment Agency. As a result of the reorganisation, State Employment Agency (SEA) consisted of Central Office, 28 Local Employment Offices (one in each district centre) and 31 sectors. The Agency is a direct administrative authority under the supervision of the Minister of Welfare.

On January 12, 2004 Ringolds Beinarovičs became the director of SEA. This year was significant as on May 1 Latvia became an EU member state, and SEA joined European Employment Services (EURES) – the cooperation network of the public employment services in EU/European Economic Area. On March 1 of the same year a European Social Fund department was established ensuring the implementation and supervision of Structural Fund projects.

2005 for the Agency was a year when new measures were developed: for job seekers – support for those who were given notice of termination, for the unemployed – a pilot project for acquiring the required abilities in the work place, and support for people with mental disorders.

In 2006 after the reorganisation of Riga Regional Employment Office, SEA consisted of 27 Local Employment Offices, 6 Client Service Centres and 25 sectors. On this year the Quality Management System was implemented.

From February 1, 2007 Agency is included in the State Civil Service institutions. Also, Agency's functions were centralised, and all supporting functions as financial resource planning and management, accounting, personnel management and economic activities were now performed centrally allowing the employees of Local Employment Offices to focus on the direct responsibilities – providing services and organising dialogue with partners.

On September 1, 2007 Professional Career Choice State Agency was added to SEA creating Career Guidance Department. One-stop agency was developed, and the unemployed and job seekers could receive all career-related services in one place. SEA developed new measures for unemployed representing disadvantaged groups – persons with diagnosed disability, special training for persons after maternity leave.

Furthermore, in 2007 the registered unemployment level was the lowest in 20 years – 4.8% with 51,660 unemployed persons.

On February 25, 2008 Baiba Paševica became the director of SEA. A notable occurrence in this year was the sudden fall in vacancies registered with SEA (from 17,662 to 3,205 at the end of the year) – result of the global economical crisis. In late 2008 the number of unemployed persons jumped to 76,435 (7%). SEA began a new support measure for the unemployed when starting a business or becoming self-employed.

2009 was the year of economical crisis: lesser work places, increased unemployment. The employment services of EU played a significant role in managing the global crisis.

At the end of the year the unemployment level was unprecedentedly high 16% (179,235), while the number of vacancies dropped to 1,389. The number of repeatedly registered unemployed was the highest ever – 223,000.

New active labour market measures were developed and introduced in an extremely short period of time. These included work practice in municipalities receiving a grant, vocational training for people at risk of unemployment, improvements in unemployed person and job seeker training. For customer convenience a Local Employment Office was opened in Sigulda.

The labour market policy measures implemented in 2010 can be divided in two categories: measures with the aim of improving the abilities and qualification of the unemployed compensating for lower labour efficiency; and measures with the aim of managing the negative social consequences of the crisis and slowing down the unemployment rates.

SEA introduced new services: Professional higher education for the unemployed, Training and work practice for SEA inspector assistants, Life-long education measures for the employed, Work practice for the youth.

In March 2010 the largest number of unemployed persons in the history of Agency was registered – 194,253 (17.3%). The average number of registered unemployed is also the highest in 20 years – 177,700. However, despite the difficulties 97,100 of the unemployed persons found permanent job within one year. 72,300 or 75% of them had participated in at least one of SEA's

active labour market measures.

SEA continued to work on new measures: Benefit for Assistance Services for Persons with Group I Visual Disability, Job for the Youth and other measures targeted toward the youth. A coupon system has been introduced for the training of the unemployed.

2012 is characterized by a gradual increase in labour market demand. According to the State Revenue Service data, more than 83,000 SEA customers found employment in 2012. In total, more than 25,000 people received SEA support.

The priority of SEA was providing services to employers. Also, more attention was granted to increase the competitiveness of the unemployed youth, long term unemployed and unemployed persons with disability or in pre-retirement age, and provide employment in State co-funded work places.

Due to the creation of new jobs in Latvia, in 2013 the unemployment levels continued to decrease. More and more unemployed persons were able to find job relatively soon. 75.5 thousand unemployed persons registered with SEA found permanent job in 2013.

One of the Agency's main tasks during the year was providing additional support to the prior target groups including working with the unemployed youth, activating the long-term unemployed by timely identifying the unemployed at risk of long-term unemployment and providing efficient support. Also, SEA prioritised the adjustment of the unemployed person abilities to the labour market demand, and improved customer service efficiency.

The employed person profiling tool was developed and implemented in 2013. It allows determining the most suitable measures for the particular person to promote his/her competitiveness and entry in the labour market. In spring the Agency established a new tradition – vacancy trade fairs in every region of Latvia, which were praised by both the employers and job seekers.

The implementation of EU Structural Funds for the period 2007 – 2013 was successfully concluded. Due to 120 administered projects in social rehabilitation and social care fields during this period, thousands of people had the opportunity to increase their quality of life, receive qualitative social rehabilitation services, acquire new abilities and knowledge, and find new job.

During the year 2014, the country experienced overall continuation of the economic growth, with the unemployment rates declining: from 93,321 at the beginning of year 2014, down to 82,027 persons at the end of the year. Level of the registered unemployment fell, during the year, from 9.5% down to 8.5%. Of the more than 73 thousand unemployed persons who found a permanent job in year 2014, nearly 29 thousand persons found employment after participating in an event held by the SEA.

In year 2014, we launched the Youth Guarantee Program, initiated by the European Commission, with involving more than 24,000 young people in support measures, and almost 11,000 unemployed young people settled into permanent employment during the year.

A major milestone in year 2014 was the resumption of the pupils' summer employment measures after a 5-year break. 4,287 pupils were employed during the pupils' summer employment measures, whereas 449 merchants and 124 municipalities and state institutions participated as employers.

The number of long-term unemployed persons also continued to decline: In year 2014, 17,852 long-term unemployed persons had settled into employment, of which 12,955 or 72.6% of long-term unemployed persons had found employment after completion of a SEA-held active employment measure.

During the year 2015, the registered unemployment level in the country stabilized: from 9% in January to 8.7% in December, reaching its lowest indicator of 8.3% in September and October. At the beginning of year 2015, the SEA had registered 82,027 unemployed persons, and 81,780 persons registered at the end of the year.

Compared to year 2014, the average duration of unemployment of the unemployed persons registered with the SEA also decreased. Of the more than 69 thousand unemployed persons who found a permanent job in year 2014, 20.5 thousand found their employment after taking part in one of the SEA's employment measures, by using the opportunities to increase their

competitiveness level in the labour market, to gain career counselling (necessary skills and abilities), or to work in subsidized jobs.

In year 2015, entrepreneurs had registered more than 51,000 vacancies with the SEA, an increase of 19% compared to year 2014. We continued to hold vacancy fairs in the regions of Latvia. In order to help farms attract the necessary workers for seasonal work, we organized, together with the Latvian Agricultural Organization Cooperation Council, the agricultural job fair "Employment in the countryside!"

In the year 2015, 25,769 young people were involved in the activities of the ESF project "Youth Guarantee", but more than 21,000 unemployed young people were settled in permanent employment.

In year 2016, level of registered unemployment in the country was 8.7% at the beginning of January, and 8.4% at the end of December. Compared to early year 2016, 81,780 unemployed persons were accounted for with the SEA, at the end of the year the number had decreased to 78,357. The number of unemployed registered with the SEA had fallen by 3.4 thousand over the year.

During the 12 months of year 2016, 72,286 unemployed persons had settled in a job, of which 20,857 had found a job after completing an active employment measure held by the SEA. In year 2016, 113,192 clients participated in the SEA active employment measures/events and preventive unemployment reduction measures.

In year 2016, 5,355 employers had registered 56,328 vacancies with the SEA. The increase in the number of vacancies was achieved thanks to active cooperation with employers, business organizations and industry associations, but also due to improvements of the SEA CV and vacancy portal, and changes in legislation, since, starting from January 1, 2016, state and municipal institutions are obliged to register all their vacancies with the SEA.

In year 2016, work began on the development of a new SEA project "Support for longer working life".

One of the new services of the SEA in year 2016 was providing of support to refugees and persons with alternative status. Responding to the current world events and the need to integrate refugees into the Latvian labour market, the project "Integration of Refugees and Persons with Alternative Status in the Latvian Labour Market" was launched.

On January 1, 2016 the Law on Voluntary Work came into force, where the accounting of voluntary employment was entrusted to the SEA. The web-site for voluntary employment www.brivpratigie.lv was launched, and the information system for voluntary work. In the new SEA information system, volunteers throughout Latvia are given the opportunity to offer their work, and all applicants are given the opportunity to apply for volunteering.

In year 2016 on the basis of the SEA CV and vacancies portal, the SEA self-service portal was created, where all SEA e-services are available.

In order to support the agricultural sector, a vacancy campaign "Be employed in the countryside!" was organized in several cities of Latvia in cooperation with the Association of Farmers, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments and the Latvian Agricultural Organization Cooperation Council.

In September 2016, director of the SEA Inese Kalvāne, was approved by the parliament of Latvia for the post of council member of the State Audit Office, whereas Inese Kalvāne ended her employment at the SEA. On December 26, 2016, Evita Simsons was appointed to the post of director of the SEA.

In year 2017, the number of registered unemployed persons continued to decrease, while the registered unemployment rate in the country overall level reached its lowest level since year 2009, at the end of year 2017 it was 6.8%. Compared to year 2016, the number of vacancies registered by employers has increased by 27%.

In the year 2017, 67,085 unemployed persons had settled in a job, of which 20,722 had found a job after completing an active employment measure held by the SEA.

In the year 2017, Evita Simsons, director of the SEA, was elected to post of the first deputy council chairman of the Network of Employment Services of the Member States of the European Union (NES). Candidate of the director of the SEA was proposed for the said post by the European Commission.

Within the campaign "Movement for good service" organised by the State Chancellery in year 2017, the title of the most responsive state institution, and the Customer Services Honour Award was received by Riga Regional branch of the SEA.

The priority directions of activities of SEA were reduction of long-term unemployment, support for unemployed persons with disabilities, and workers over 50 years, as well as promotion of employment of the young unemployed persons, paying great attention not only to active but also preventive employment measures.

The number of long-term unemployed persons had fallen by 19% during the year. In order to bolster inclusion of the long-term unemployed persons in the employment market, in year 2017, within the framework of the European Social Fund (ESF) project "Support for the long-term unemployed", the SEA initiated implementation of new services – "Emotional stress therapy", "Job search motivation and social mentoring services" and "Professional aptitude tests".

The number of unemployed persons with disabilities had fallen by 13% during the year. In the autumn of year 2017, a new SEA campaign "Open Day in Enterprises for Persons with Disabilities" was organised, offering persons with disabilities the opportunity to get to know the working environment and work process in companies in personal presence. In year 2017, an e-catalogue was also prepared for employers "Suitable work environment for persons with disabilities".

In year 2017, in cooperation with the Latvian Employers' Confederation and the Latvian Free Trade Union Confederation, the implementation of the ESF project "Support for Longer Working Life" was launched, which provides a number of preventive measures/events aimed to help older workers retain their jobs.

In year 2017, a new online service was developed – the e-learning program "My Money Today and Tomorrow. Financial Literacy".

In order to address cross-border employment issues, in year 2017, the SEA, in cooperation with the Estonian Employment Service, Valka County Council and Valga City Municipality, launched the implementation of the Cross-Border Co-operation Program INTERREG EST-LAT project "Promoting Cross-Border Labour Market Integration and Employment".

The registered unemployment rates continued to fall also in year 2018, falling to just 6.1% in September and October, the lowest since year 2008. During the year, 63,633 unemployed persons registered with the SEA started their employment, of whom 22,516 or 35.4% were employed after completing an event organised by the SEA.

In year 2018, employers had registered 88,492 vacancies with the SEA, which was 24% more than in year 2017.

At the end of year 2018, the largest target groups of the registered unemployed were the unemployed persons aged 50 and over – 40.5%, and the long-term unemployed persons – 25.1%.

In year 2018, within framework of the ESF project "Support for longer working life", methodics were developed for the measure "Assessment of work environment and human resources", and announcement for employers' application for support was made. In its turn, the ESF project "Support for the Long-term Unemployed Persons" offered customers comprehensive support, including counselling by psychologists, psychotherapists and other professionals, treatment for addictions, determination of occupational suitability, occupational health doctors, job search motivational and social mentoring services. In order to make support activities of SEA more accessible, participants were also offered transportation, food and, if necessary, accommodation.

The SEA also focused on the inclusion in the labour market of persons leaving imprisonment places. In six penitentiary establishments of Latvia, the SEA's career counsellors, in cooperation with the Administration of Penitentiary Establishments, provided pre-release counselling of the prisoners.

For the first time in year 2018, the regional employment support campaign "Career Days for Job Seekers" was organized in the

geographic service areas of all SEA branches with participation of approximately 3.5 thousand jobseekers. At the end of year 2018, the European Union funds project "Youth Guarantee" implemented by the SEA was successfully completed. During the implementation of the project, unemployment among young people in Latvia has decreased significantly.

In order to facilitate the return of Latvian nationals working abroad to the Latvian labour market, a number of measures/events to support re-emigration, have been implemented in cooperation with the Latvian diaspora abroad, Latvian embassies, employers and other relevant public institutions, including face-to-face meetings of SEA leaders with EURES advisers in Sweden, Germany, Great Britain and Ireland. Section "In case you want to return to Latvia" was launched on website of the SEA.

In March of year 2018, a new service – "E-Application for services of State Social Insurance Agency" – was introduced, offering unemployed people the opportunity to apply electronically to the State Social Insurance Agency for unemployment benefits through the SEA. The interactive e-learning module "My Money Today and Tomorrow", developed in 2018 and available on the SEA website, enables unemployed and job seekers to learn financial literacy remotely.

In order to facilitate better integration of persons with refugee or alternative status into the labour market, the SEA launched in year 2018 the support measure "Latvian language mentor service for employed refugees and persons with alternative status".

Year 2018 marked the centenary of the Latvian state. On May 24, the international conference "Employment in Latvia Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", organised by the SEA, was held. At this conference, Latvian and foreign officials and experts discussed current trends and challenges in the labour market, as well as the role of employment services, the impact of globalization, demographics and digital technologies, and the development of the Latvian labour market in an international context. A conference dedicated to volunteering in Latvia, "Volunteering – My Favourite Work" ("Brīvprātība – mans sirdsdarbs") was also organized to mark the centenary of the country.

<https://www.nva.gov.lv/en/history-state-employment-agency>